Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

March 12, 2001

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Fisheries Division
- Endangered Species Coordinator
- Nongame Coordinator
- Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
- Kalispell Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Green Mountain Conservation District, P.O. Box 1329, Trout Creek, MT 59874
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Mr. Mike Miller, 548 Elk Creek Road, Heron, MT 59844
Watershed Consulting, 410 Wisconsin Avenue, Whitefish, MT 59937
Christine and Steve Michaels, 233 Whitepine Creek Rd., Trout Creek, MT 59874
Paul and Bonnie Chambers, 249 Whitepine Creek Rd., Trout Creek, MT 59874
Charles and Jennifer Giffen, 291 Whitepine Creek Rd., Trout Creek, MT 59874
Karen Self, 128220-B Tomanant Trail, Austin, TX 78727
Jerry Johnson, 18711 Cedar Valley Way, Newhall, CA 91321

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore lower White Pine Creek. The proposed project is located approximately 15 miles north of the town of Thompson Falls in Sanders County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., April 12, 2001 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
White Pine Creek Channel Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purposes of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program. This project is being proposed to restore a 2.5 mile reach of White Pine Creek by constructing a proper channel morphology, stabilizing eroding stream banks with root wads and vegetation and conducting extensive re-vegetation work within the riparian corridor. The intent of the project is to provide for the efficient downstream transport of bedload, restore the riparian vegetative community and improve fish habitat. The project site, involving oversight by the White Pine Creek Watershed Council and a private consultant, includes multiple landowners on three separate reaches of stream. The project area is located approximately 15 miles north of the town of Thompson Falls in Sanders County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on White Pine Creek located approximately 15 miles north of the town of Thompson Falls within Township 21 North, Range 31West, Sections 14 and 15 in Sanders County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "restore and enhance degraded habitats" by implementing the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposal would help achieve this goal.

The White Pine Creek watershed is characterized by forested slopes in the uplands and rural residential development in the valley bottom. The lower reaches of White Pine Creek have been impacted in the past by road construction, logging, grazing, cropping, channel alterations and urbanization. These past land use activities have weakened erosion resistance and channel stability and have reduced aquatic diversity. This project proposes to adjust the morphology of the channel to a proper dimension, pattern and profile; stabilize actively eroding stream banks; and conduct an extensive re-vegetation effort within the riparian corridor. White Pine Creek supports westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The stream also provides spawning habitat for rainbow trout and brown trout in the lower reaches.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore three reaches within the lower 2.5 miles of White Pine Creek (Attachments 2, 3, 4 and 5). The proposal calls for using natural material revetment to stabilize the flood-stripped floodplain and eroding cut-banks. Additionally, width to depth ratios will be reduced in portions of the

channel that have been over-widened as a result of aggradation. Bank stabilization techniques will vary between sites, ranging from the installation of anchored brush bundles to the installation of a combination of root wads and rock. The flood-stripped floodplain will be stabilized using a combination of brush bars and the planting of riparian vegetation. The establishment of proper channel dimensions to insure efficient movement of bedload will be based on width to depth ratios as measured in a stable reference reach. Finally, the riparian corridor will be re-vegetated using a combination of seeding and planting techniques incorporating shrubs and trees. This project is expected to cost $51,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $20,000.00. The project is intended to help meet the long-term goals of the White Pine Creek Watershed Council, a local watershed group.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoration of the existing channel is expected to create a healthier habitat for aquatic life by reducing sediment input and increasing aquatic diversity. Installation of root wad revetments will provide for an increase in overhead cover and will create hydraulic conditions for pool scour. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance resident trout populations in the stream. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by the extensive re-vegetation effort proposed within the riparian corridor.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, stabilizing the existing channel and restoring the riparian vegetative community would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during project construction, but would stabilize quickly following proposed re-vegetation and stream bank stabilization efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with stream bank stabilization efforts, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring an unstable reach of stream to a more healthy and natural stream environment. Aesthetics would be further enhanced by proposed re-vegetation efforts within the riparian corridor.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources

White Pine Creek contains both westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Because White Pine Creek supports bull trout, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's Section 6 conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Restoration of the lower reaches of the stream should improve habitat for both species by creating a stable channel morphology; restoring floodplain function; and extensively planting trees and shrubs in the riparian corridor.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the restoration of White Pine Creek would improve overall aquatic habitat and, as a result, would enhance resident trout populations, as well as fish populations migrating from Noxon Reservoir. Consequently, the project is expected to improve the recreational fishery in the stream and possibly Noxon Reservoir.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

A local watershed group, called the White Pine Creek Watershed Council, was recently formed to address watershed problems in the White Pine Creek drainage. The Council funded a consulting firm to prepare a watershed assessment of the drainage as part of a watershed-wide management approach. This project will help meet the goals identified in the prepared watershed assessment. The Council has identified this restoration work as a short-term solution to watershed problems. Long-term solutions will require good land stewardship in the drainage and future cooperation of the property owners.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of White Pine Creek will remain unstable for the foreseeable future. This instability will result in continued bank erosion, excessive sediment loading and the loss of fish habitat. In addition, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore the lower reach of White Pine Creek by adjusting channel morphology to a proper dimension, pattern and profile; stabilizing eroding stream banks with root wads and anchored brush bundles; and restoring the riparian vegetative community with an extensive re-vegetation effort. These activities will create a more stable stream channel, resulting in a healthier habitat for aquatic life. The seeding and planting of a variety of grasses, shrubs and trees along the stream margin would create more diverse habitat for riparian dependent wildlife. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations in the stream and possibly Noxon Reservoir. As part of a larger watershed effort, the project will help meet the long-term goals of the White Pine Creek Watershed Council.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks web page: fwp.state.mt.us.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on April 12, 2001.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

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e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title White Pine Creek Channel Restoration Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement
Description of Project The project is being proposed to restore the lower portion of White Pine Creek to a proper channel morphology; stabilize actively eroding stream banks; and conduct extensive re-vegetation work within the riparian corridor. The intent of the project is to provide for the efficient transport of bedload, the restoration of floodplain function and improvement in fish habitat. The project site, involving multiple landowners, is located approximately 15 miles north of the town of Thompson Falls in Sanders County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals			X			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping

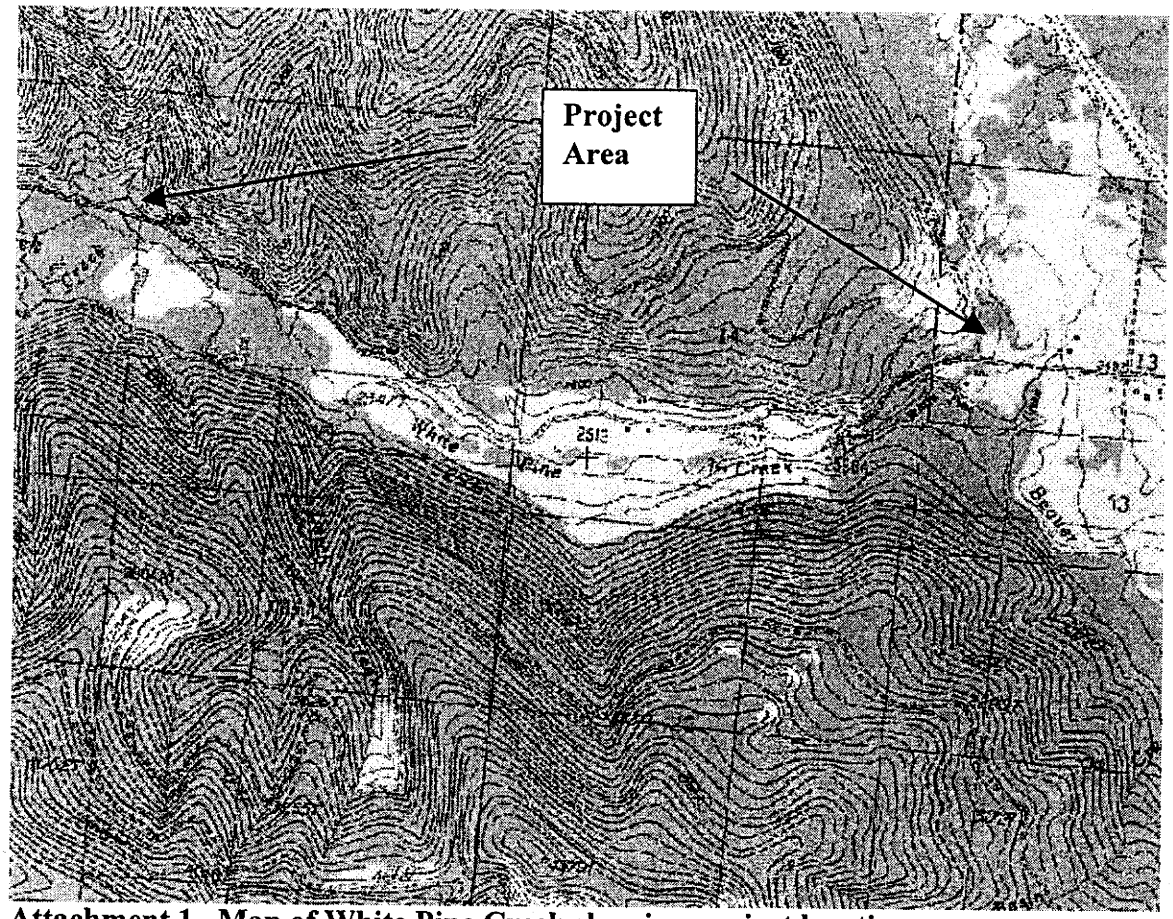
jurisdiction Green Mountain Conservation District, NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Mike Miller, White Pine Creek Watershed Council; Watershed Consulting

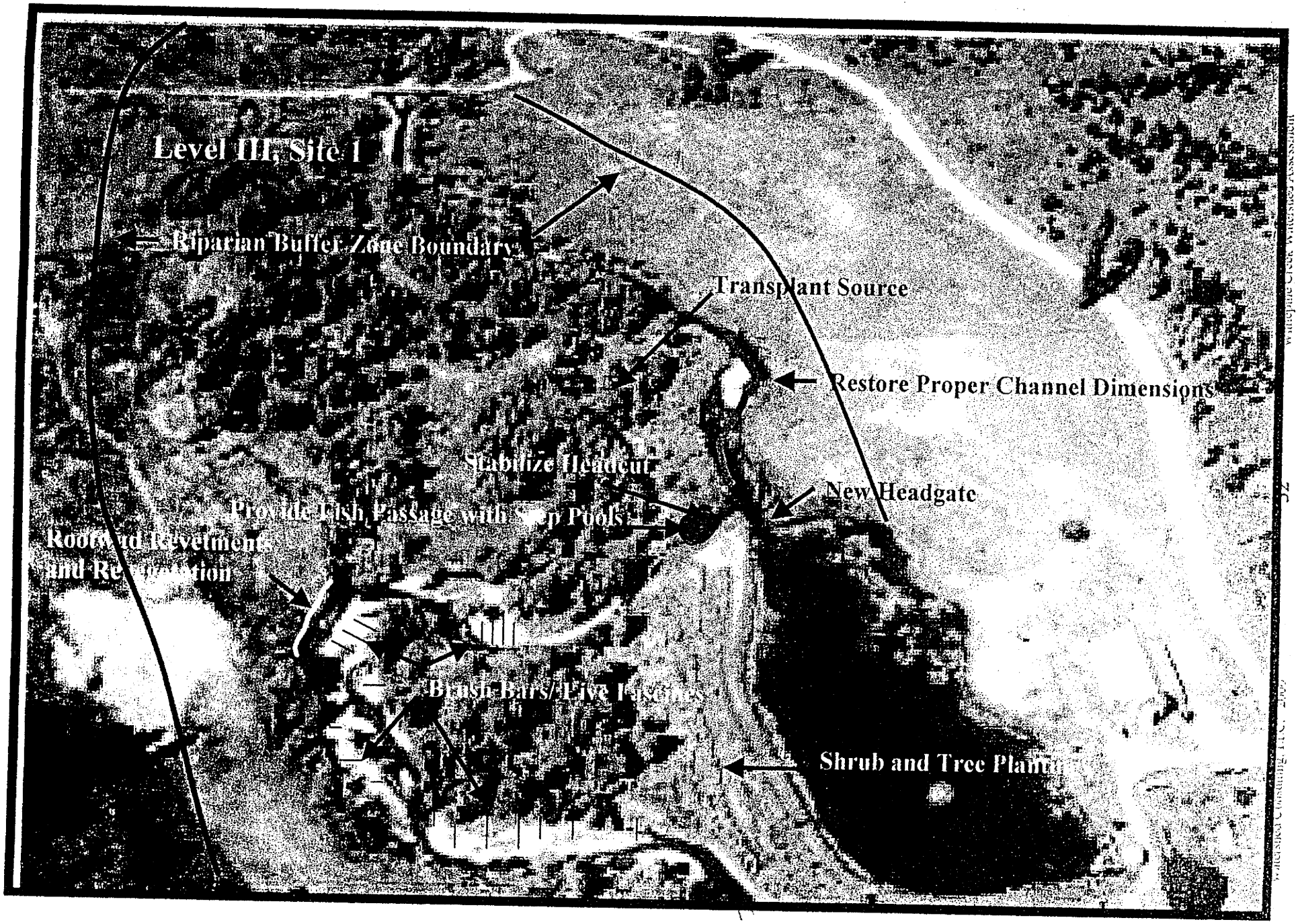
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: February 27, 2001



Attachment 1. Map of White Pine Creek showing project location.



ATTACHMENT 2.

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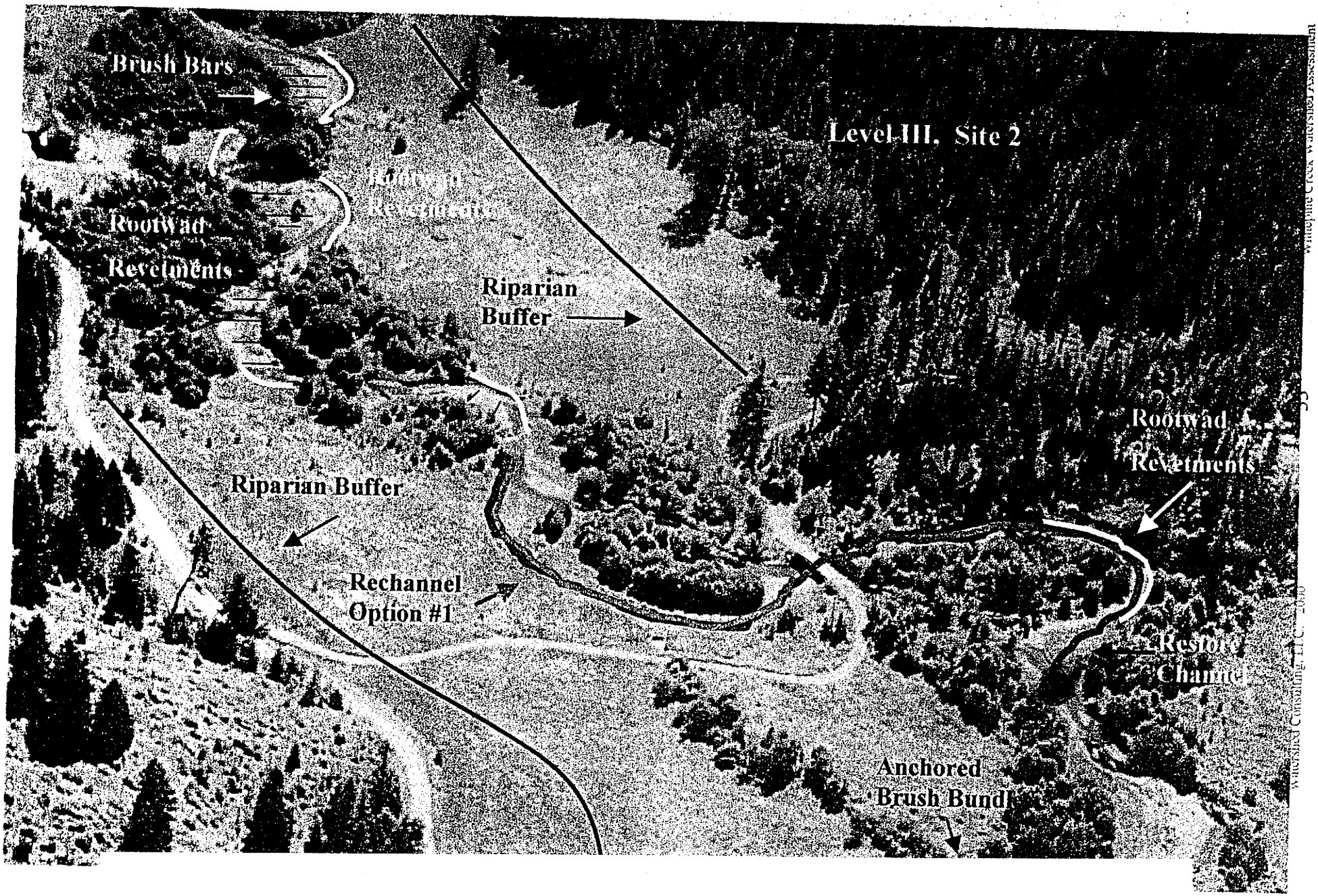
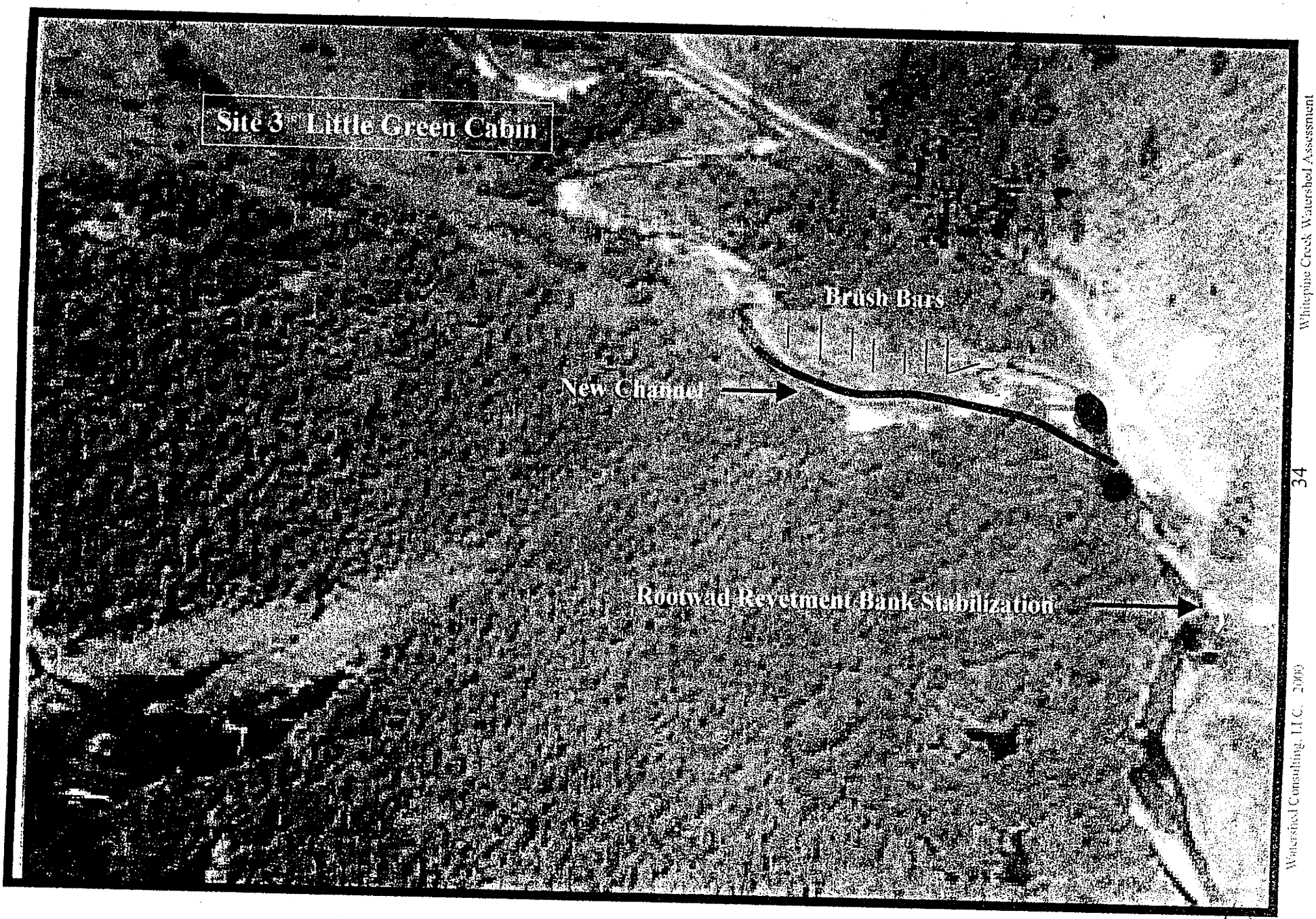

Brush Bars
Level III, Site 2
Rootwad
Revetments
Riparian
Buffer
Rootwad
Revetments
Riparian Buffer
Rechannel
Option #1
Restore
Channel
Anchored
Brush Bundl

ATTACHM 'T 3.



ATTACHMENT 4.

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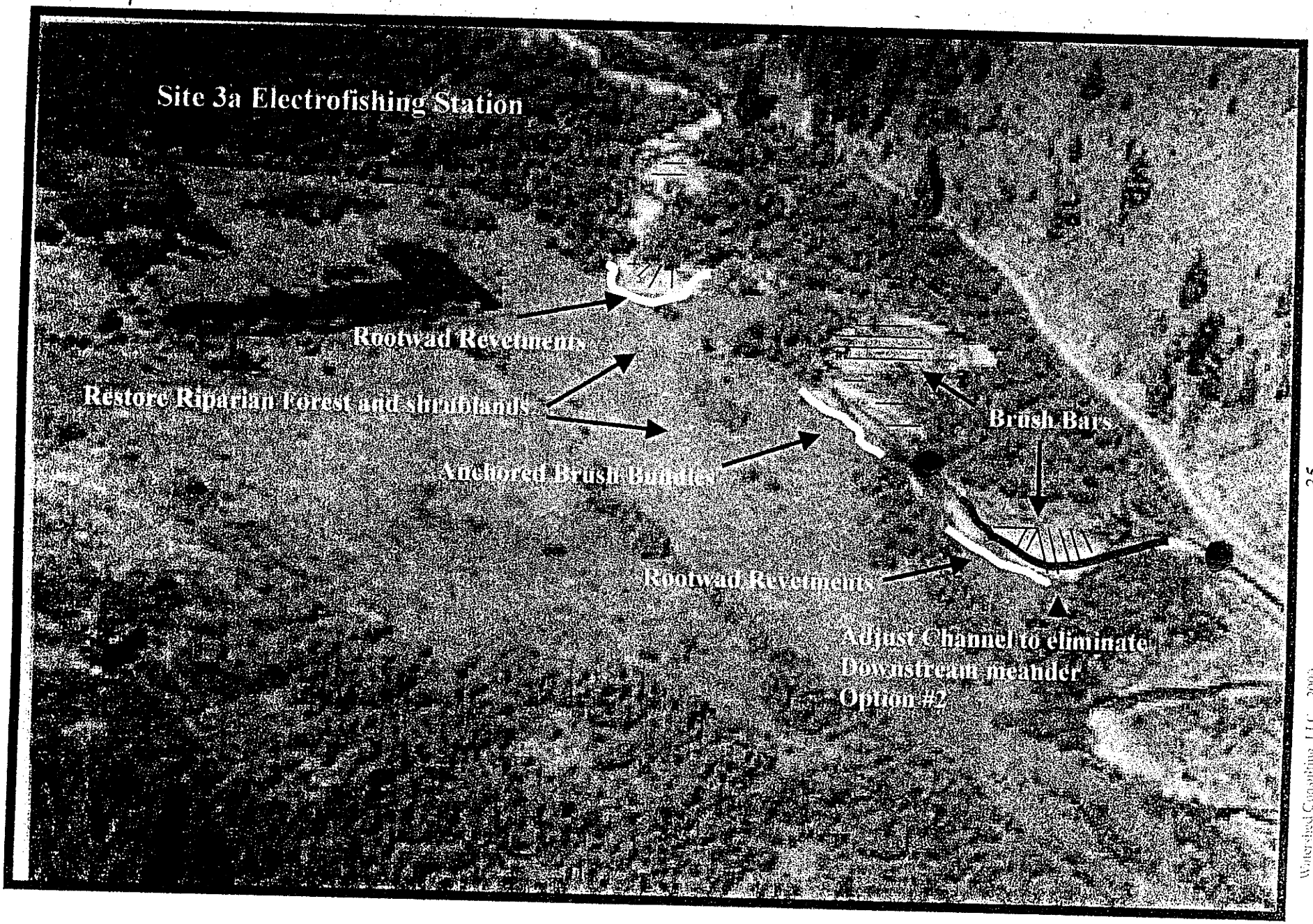

ATTACHMENT 5.